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A FREE UNION

A Comedy of
“FREE LOVE”



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A ONE ACT COMEDY
OF "FREE LOVE"

By
MARY MARCY

CHICAGO
CHARLES H. KERR & COMPANY
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TO
MY SISTER
INEZ STEPHENS

CHARACTERS

JAMES K. HUMBOLDT, an impecunious
printer.

SONIA BAROWSKI, a "free woman".

OWEN HEDDON, a poet.

JEAN WARD, fiancée of Humboldt.

A FREE UNION

A ONE ACT COMEDY
OF "FREE LOVE".

Time: Present. Scene: a combined studio and living room in Chicago.

About the room are scattered half finished drawings and paintings, an easel, book case, library table, a couch, mirror, hat rack and chairs. A window to the rear leads out upon a small balcony. Over the window hangs a motto which reads:

PERSONAL LIBERTY

IS GOD

OF THIS SHRINE.

A picture of an explosive-looking youth with flying hair and wild eyes, hangs over the book case, bearing the inscription: "A martyr to the ignorance of Anthony Comstock". A woman's hat hangs on the wall.

A box of collars and cigarette case lie on top of the book case. The table is littered with glasses, beer and wine bottles.

(Enter Humboldt, at right, in shirt sleeves. His face is covered with lather and he carries a razor in his hand. Goes to mirror by window where light is best for shaving)

HUMBOLDT:

(shaving)

Watch that the coffee don't boil over; will you, Sonia? Just a few minutes.

SONIA:

(outside)

Yes. Did you put on the toast?
(enters clad in house jacket, skirt and slippers. Clears away empty bottles, beer and wine glasses which litter the table)

HUMBOLDT:

(shaving)

Yes, and I've made *my* half of the bed.

SONIA :

Your half? I'd be ashamed. I never saw anybody so afraid of a little house-work as you are. Big people are not above doing the little things.

HUMBOLDT :

"Of course; but you want me to do them *all*. I don't think a "free" man ought to expect a woman to earn the money, but I *do* think she ought to do half the joint work, and that's something you have never done.

SONIA :

Didn't I sweep yesterday? And iron your silk shirt?

HUMBOLDT :

It was the first time. You washed half a dozen for Owen and had time to do a little mending for him too, before you went to the concert together; didn't you?

SONIA:

(Picking up odds and ends)

There you go again. Jealous! You do not want me to have any friends or go anywhere without you. You are so illogical! Why don't you admit that you're just an ordinary man who believes that woman's place is the home and who wants to keep her there?

HUMBOLDT:

I'm not.

SONIA:

O, yes you are.

HUMBOLDT:

There! The coffee's boiling over.

(Rushes out) (outside)

Why didn't you watch it?

SONIA:

I'm not your wife, nor your servant, and I don't propose to act like them. It's your

place to watch the coffee just as much as it is mine.

(Sets cups and saucers, plates and fruit on table)

SONIA:

Why *should* women do the housework, and the cooking and the sewing? Just because they have permitted themselves to be made slaves in the past?

HUMBOLDT:

(outside)

Slaves? Ha! Ha! That's good. Go on.

SONIA:

It's true. But I'm a free woman and I propose to remain one. Let the men do the cooking and the sweeping and the baking for awhile. Women could do the big things far better than you men have ever done them.

(Enter Humboldt bearing tray with coffee pot, cream, sugar and toast. Sets them on table)

HUMBOLDT:

Then you might try earning the money that pays for the bacon.

SONIA:

(Arranging things on table)

(Scornfully)

Husband! O you pitiful creature! Before I'd mention money. 'Typical man trick.

(mimicking him)

I pay the bills! I earn the money! I—I—I! And so you think you ought to lord it over the women.

HUMBOLDT:

(has arranged his tie before mirror)

(turns around)

Lord, no! I don't want to be anything—

except *absent*. Sonia, you don't know how sick I am of this so-called "freedom". Free as air I am, I suppose? *Not!* Free to earn the money, when I am not free to be cooking for your friends; free to go to bed if they don't decide to talk all night; free to get up—when you are ready to get up—at one or two o'clock; free to wash dishes and entertain your friends, and free to pray for a chance to get at my work. Free to work for you—when you give me the opportunity. Free! Free! Free! Ha! Ha! You make me laugh.

(stops shortly)

HUMBOLDT:

What! Only *two* plates and two cups and saucers? And I made *tea*, too. Am I to have the pleasure of your society alone this morning—afternoon rather? Where's Owen?

SONIA:

He had an appointment with the dentist.

(pours coffee)

HUMBOLDT:

(sitting down)

What an unexpected pleasure to breakfast tete-a-tete with you. This is the first time in two months when Owen hasn't dropped in, quite by accident, of course, along about two o'clock to have breakfast with us. We will not need to have breakfast food this morning. And Owen's grape fruit—Ah, well, cheer up. He may happen along later.

(eats fruit)

SONIA:

Shame! Shame! O I can't believe you intend to be so small as to begrudge a seat at our table to a guest like Owen!

HUMBOLDT:

Ha! Ha! A *guest*? That's rich! A guest? My dear, Owen is a *boarder*, a regular, non-paying boarder. You know

perfectly well we have oatmeal and cream every morning, especially for Owen, and grape fruit or berries, and bacon, and *tea*—Owen *must* have his tea, you know—all for little Owen. And how long is it since we have had dinner in the flat without Owen? It must be four months at least.

SONIA:

O you petty-minded thing, you! To *think* such things. Real men, men who believe in individual freedom, do not stoop so low. Owen is a poet, an artist, a dreamer and a genius! He would not think of such things. If he had all the gold in the world, he would open his arms and spill it at the feet of the poor, the men hungering for beauty, the soul-starved. Oh!

HUMBOLDT:

Go on. I like to hear you. We'll agree that Owen is the one perfect human flower.

But he toileth not; neither doth he spin, and yet, low and vulgar as it may be to observe such things, I have remarked that Owen dineth well. He wears good clothing; he rides in taxicabs. How? Who puts up the filthy lucre? Somebody pays. There's a whole lot the matter with society but I guess the biggest wrong is done by the man who eats and sleeps and rides and wears good clothes for which he does not pay. *Somebody* always makes, and *pays* for everything.

SONIA:

(sipping her coffee)

It would be useless to try to make *you* understand. You are merely jealous because Owen admires me. You have the old dollar standard in your mind. You have never outgrown it. You measure Owen by the dollars he does not possess—

(sarcastically)

—like the butcher or the grocer. How

could I explain Art to you? But poetry, ideals, beauty, freedom—*Owen* has these things.

HUMBOLDT:

(helping himself to the toast)

You're damn right he has freedom. Non-paying freedom is all very nice for the man who enjoys it, but what about the man who does the paying? What about *me*? Its all very fine for the man who can spend money he did not earn, drink where he does not pay, ride in cars he did not build; its mighty nice to be able to come into another man's room and be able to help yourself to his only decent suit of clothes, like *Owen* did to me! But what about the man who *does* build the cars? Make the money and earn the clothes?

SONIA:

(with great exaltation)

(still eating)

But *Owen* *does* pay. He pays by his

presence, his inspiration, his poetry—his love of beauty. It is the grubbers, the diggers, the *clods*, like you, who would never get out of the mire if it were not for the men like Owen. Why, Owen—

(she places her cup in her saucer and speaks deliberately with awe in her tones)

Owen — walks — all night — sometimes—gazing at the stars! Owen—

HUMBOLDT:

(interrupts in disgust)

Because he hadn't a place to sleep. I know.

(imitating her awe-filled tones)

Why Owen spent his last dollar one night, when he didn't know where he was going to sleep—to—hear—Pagliacci. Art! Poetry! Ideals! What need have we of bath tubs, or soap, or beds or blankets when we can have these things!

(changing his manner to imitate Owen's explosive sentences)

Is it not so, my dear?

SONIA:

You're jealous. You don't like me to go about with Owen and you never have. You want to shut me up like a husband locks up a wife, and make me your slave. But you cannot.

HUMBOLDT:

Shut you up? Who? Me? Never! Owen is in love with you and you care more for him than you do for me. Exit happy little me. I'm sick of this—

(sneering)

“free” atmosphere where a man can't even call his shirt his own; where he has to stay up all night getting up “free” lunches for the friends of his Lady Fair; where I have to give up serious, decent attempts at painting to portray ladies in silk

underwear, at \$60 a week to make money enough to buy other peoples' freedom. I'm *done*. Get that? I'm through. I'm going to move to-day and permit you and Owen to be just as free as you can.

SONIA:

*(alarmed, rising and throwing her arms
about his neck)*

(wheedlingly)

That's a naughty way to talk, Honeybun. You wouldn't leave your little baby girl; would you? You know she loves you more than anybody else. Nobody is so nice as my old Scoldy-patch when he *wants* to be nice.

HUMBOLDT:

(waving her aside)

Listen, Sonia. I'll never get anywhere leading this sort of a life. I've got to get off by myself where I can have rest and quiet to get anything done or get any-

where with my work. In the past year when we have been together, I have not produced one good thing. I'm growing stale. I'm losing the little ability I once had. Bed at two or three o'clock; folks coming in at all hours to be fed; rising at one o'clock to breakfast at two—with Owen or somebody else—I can't stand it. We just go over the same round—day after day.

SONIA:

(laying her head on his coat sleeve)

Jimmie, dear, kiss me and stop that old crossy-talk. I'll fix up a place where you can paint in the kitchenette, over the gas stove. (pause) If you don't be a good boy, I'll run away with Owen, and then you'll be such a sorry one!

HUMBOLDT:

*(submitting to her carresses unwillingly,
but still submitting unbendingly)*

Where's this affair between you and Owen going to end anyway?

SONIA:

(pensively)

I don't know, Jimmie.

HUMBOLDT:

You're in love with each other. I saw him kissing you in the hall last night. Why not own up?

SONIA:

(with spirit)

Because it isn't true. We're only friends.

HUMBOLDT:

But how is it going to end? If you do fall in love with Owen, what then?

SONIA:

(defiantly)

Well, you shall not keep me locked up in

a prison. I mean to *grow*. That's what we believe in; isn't it? In growing, in turning our souls toward the light, in expanding, in seeking truth and love and beauty and inspiration no matter who may be hurt or where it may lead?

HUMBOLDT:

And if a woman finds a new love—a new mate, she leaves the old one like a piece of cast-off clothing. Yes, that's the theory. And what about the one who is left behind, Sonia?

SONIA:

I never said I was going to leave you. I'm not.

HUMBOLDT:

(arranging a silk kimona over the back of a chair and getting out his pens and ink for sketching)

But if the Light, or the Truth or the

other man or woman come along, we forsake the outgrown (the old) and cling to the new for the benefit of our souls. That's right; isn't it, Sonia?

SONIA:

(defiantly)

Yes, that is it. And if you keep on being as small and petty and stingy and domineering as you have been the past two months, it will not be long, either. I'll love fifty men if I want to. I've loved men before I met you, and you will not be the last if you take that tack, so you may as well stop trying to curtail my freedom right now.

HUMBOLDT:

(continuing to draw)

Oh! Is that so? Well, Sonia, does the same rule apply to *women* as to *men*?

SONIA:

Just like a conservative! Of course!

HUMBOLDT:

And does the same rule apply to *men*
as to *women*?

*(Sonia looks up quickly and with some
suspicion) (slowly)*

SONIA:

Yes. Why?

HUMBOLDT:

I just wanted to make sure.

(a knock is heard at the door)

SONIA:

(calls)

Come in.

*(Owen bursts into the room, beaming upon
the world in general. He kisses Sonia's
hand gallantly)*

OWEN:

How lovely you are this morning!

HUMBOLDT :

(continuing to draw)

Afternoon, you mean, my dear Owen.

(Humboldt, glacing at Sonia—)

(to Owen)

Have you had breakfast?

OWEN :

(making himself at home, puts gloves, stick and hat on rack)

With Mrs. Endicott, Jim. But I'll have a bit of grape fruit, I think.

(Owen disappears into the kitchenette where he procures grape fruit and with it returns to the studio and living room. Seats himself at the table from which the fruit dish has not been removed)

SONIA :

I'll be ready in five minutes, Owen. Just make yourself at home.

(Owen eats his grape fruit with gusto.)

Jim draws and Sonia disappears into the bed room. Owen looks over the fruit and puts an orange into the right hand pocket of his coat)

OWEN :

The fool laundryman forgot to deliver my duds, Jim. Guess I'll have to borrow one of your collars.

HUMBOLDT :

Do. Anything I have is yours, you know.

OWEN :

(continues to eat)

Thanks.

(examines the apples on the table and having finally satisfied himself as to the largest, puts it into left pocket of his coat)

What's the good word, Jim? What are you sketching? Kimonas? Humph! Don't think I'd be interested. Too fond of Art, you know.

(Owen picks his teeth leisurely)

OWEN :

I remember one time when I was in Paris I grew so absorbed in one of Cazin's canvasses that I forgot all about lunch and dinner. Didn't eat a bite all day. In the clouds—Oh! (dreamily) The wonderful haze and those purple mists of Cazin!

HUMBOLDT :

You must have been enraptured.

(Owen goes straight to a collar box on the book case and takes out a clean collar which he proceeds to put on)

OWEN :

Yes; yes. Art is the essence of Life.
In fact—

(with great solemnity as he struggles with his collar button)

Jim, the real artist lives only for Art's sake. Art! Poetry! Love! Freedom!

SONIA :

(appears drawing on her gloves)

Come on, Owen, or we'll be late.

(Owen gives himself a last approving glance in the mirror and takes hat, gloves and stick. He notices cigarette case. Pauses to open it and empty contents into his hand. He stops, considers a bit and decides to leave one for Humboldt. Places it back in the case and the case back on the book case)

OWEN :

(to Sonia)

I want to read you a little poem I dashed off last night, Sonia.

(to Jim)

Goodbye.

(they hurry toward the door and go out together. Owen is heard saying—)

OWEN :

You remember that night we sat on the

beach and watched the sail boats coming into the harbor—

SONIA:

(remembering to stick her head back through the door, to call to Humboldt—)

Goodbye, Jimmie. Let the dishes stand if you want to work. Back sometime.

HUMBOLDT:

Goodbye. Don't hurry. .

(Sonia's head disappears and she and Owen can be heard talking as they descend the stairs)

(Humboldt lays down his work and sighs. Goes to book case and opens cigarette case. Removes the one cigarette and lights it shaking his head and grinning)

HUMBOLDT:

(aloud)

Thank the Lord they're gone. Now I'll

just lock the door to keep out any other visitors and get this—

(locks door and glances at drawing)

—damn petticoat and kimona sketch ready for the Journal. Then I'll pack up and light out. I've given her warning enough. She will not miss anything but the money, anyway, and I'll leave her half—

(pulls bills out of pocket and counts aloud—)

Ten, 'leven, sixteen, seventeen, nineteen—
(he stands a moment reckoning his liabilities and his assets. Then thrusts the money back into his pocket and resumes his sketching)

(a knock is heard at the door, and Humboldt sits very quietly so the guest will depart. The knock is repeated and a soft voice is heard asking some one in the hall:

JEAN WARD:

Is this Mr. Humboldt's studio?

*(Humboldt leaps to his feet, turns the key
and throws open the door)*

HUMBOLDT:

Why Jeanie Ward! What good wind
blew you this way?

*(Humboldt takes her hand and draws her
into the room)*

JEAN:

O, Jimmie, I have splendid news for you!
Mr. Prescott told me that Jack Linden
wants you to illustrate his new Northern
stories for the Century, in *colors*! So I
looked you up. Isn't it great?

HUMBOLDT:

Well, I should say it is! Come. Sit
down and tell me all about it.

JEAN:

(sits)

Well, just for a minute. I slipped out

of the studio without leaving any word, and I've piles of work.

(she sees his easel)

JEAN:

Drawing? May I see it?

HUMBOLDT:

(greatly embarrassed)

Of course. But it's awful. It's a petti-coat advertisement. I'm ashamed to have you know. But I had to do some of this stuff to keep the pot boiling.

JEAN:

(shaking her head) (looking at picture)

Well, you've got to stop it. It's a crying shame to see a man with your ability doing such things.

(she sees a woman's hat hanging on the rack and looks at Humboldt)

JEAN:

Are these your rooms, Jimmie?

(Humboldt follows her glance. He looks about the room to see if there is other evidence of the presence of Sonia. Sees nothing more)

HUMBOLDT:

Yes, Jean. That hat belongs to one of my models. But let us talk about you and me.

JEAN:

But I mustn't stay. Do you know. Jimmie, I hate to think of you having models up here?

(points to window)

JEAN:

Is that a balcony?

HUMBOLDT:

Yes. Want to see it?

(Jean walks to window and steps out. He follows her)

HUMBOLDT:

I had flowers and vines growing there last spring.

JEAN:

(steps back into studio with Humboldt)

It's nice, but there's no view and the light is not very good in here. If you take the Steiner studio, Jimmie—

HUMBOLDT:

I mean to. I was going to pack up and move this afternoon. Will you pose for me sometimes over there?

(Jean seats herself on couch)

JEAN:

Of course.

HUMBOLDT:

From now on I want to see you every day, dear.

(he sits beside her on couch and slips his arm around her waist)

HUMBOLDT :

You know I've been frittering away my time long enough. I have wasted a whole year. But now, Jeanie dear, I have something to strive for—I'm going to do nothing but good work, if it is in me, from now on. I am going to enter the contest for the grand prize.

JEAN :

(looking up shyly)

The grand prize, Jimmie?

HUMBOLDT :

Nothing less. Do you think I shall ever win it?

JEAN :

(looking away)

Am I the grand prize, Jimmie?

HUMBOLDT:

The grandest prize of all. Do you think I shall ever be able to win her if I work very hard and save up enough money to furnish a nice little apartment for two? O, Jean!

(draws her close to him)

You are Snow White and Red Rose all in one!

Do you know that I love you, Dear Heart?

(Jean lays her cheek against his cheek and slips her arm about his neck)

JEAN:

I will come to you, Jimmie.

(Humboldt puts his hand under her chin and tilts back her head)

HUMBOLDT:

And we'll be married and live in a beautiful little home made up of sunshine

and roses, of fresh air and fragrance, and love and work. O my Jeanie!

(they kiss)

(the door is here thrust violently open and Sonia bursts into the room like a March wind. She pauses dramatically and surveys the pair in scorn. They rise but stand clinging to each other. Humboldt raises his head defiantly)

SONIA:

(to Humboldt)

Who is this woman? I saw her on our balcony. Who is she?

HUMBOLDT:

(taking Jean's hand)

Sonia, allow me to present my fiancée, Miss Jean Ward.

(Jean half advances toward Sonia. Sonia, sneering, steps forward)

SONIA:

This *is* interesting. I am Jim's wife. Our wife and our sweetheart! How unfortunate that they should meet.

(she removes hat and walks familiarly into bedroom and throws it upon the bed)

JEAN:

(gasping)

Jimmie! You never told me you were married. O, Jimmie!

HUMBOLDT:

I'm *not* married. That's ~~one~~ of her devilish lies to separate us. I never married anybody and the only woman in the world I want is *you*.

SONIA:

(returning, in an icy voice—)

Legally, Miss Ward, I believe we would not be called married. We do not believe

in conventional man-made laws. We are living together in a Free Union and have been, here in this house for a year now.

(her rage flares up and she turns to Humboldt)

SONIA:

O you dog! You brute! To treat me in this way, when I've given up everything in this world for you; when I've made myself your slave, believing that a spiritual union, a *free* union would hold you just as fast as the Law would. And you—

(turning to Jean)

What do you mean by coming into another woman's home trying to steal her husband? Throwing yourself into his arms! O! I respect the women of the streets more! You bold, shameless, indecent thing! A street-walker would have more self-respect!

HUMBOLDT:

Sonia, you have said quite enough. I will not have it!

SONIA:

(wringing her hands)

O *won't* you? She *would*. A street-walker would not stoop so low. O you brute! You dog! You beast!

(Sonia, to Jean, seizing a hair-brush)

And *you*. Get out of my house! Get out! Do you hear? And never let me see your face again. Get out!

(Sonia goes toward Jean menacingly)

JEAN:

(moving toward the door)

I think I'll be going, Jim.

HUMBOLDT:

(getting between the two women and re-

*ceiving a blow on the arm intended for
Jean)*

No! No! Wait!

*(Humboldt holds Sonia who struggles
furiously with him)*

HUMBOLDT:

(to Jean)

You cannot go till I have explained.

SONIA:

(frantically struggling, says to Jean)

Get out, you prostitute! You cowardly
sneak! You thief! Get out of my house
before I kill you.

*(Humboldt pushes her into a chair. She
screams:—)*

SONIA:

Dog!

(struggle)

O you cur!

(struggle)

You brute! To think that you should try to desert *me*—to think that you should bring a shameless woman into our home—to think—

(sobs)

O Jimmie, Jimmie, send her away!

(Jean Ward stands coldly at the door)

HUMBOLDT:

(in tones of ice)

Listen, Sonia, I am going to marry Miss Ward, if she will have me after this scene. You may as well make up your mind to that. It is true that we have lived together here for a year. I intended to move to-day. I told you that. I have been trying to get away for two months.

(to Jean)

I'm only one of her many lovers, or so-called lovers. I was not the first by any means.

SONIA:

That's a lie! They are *not* my lovers!

HUMBOLDT:

Over and over again, Sonia, you have said these things yourself. You wanted to be *free*, to come and go when you would, love when you chose and whom you chose, and you have done these things.

(Miss Ward turns toward the door uncertainly)

SONIA:

(interrupting)

She shall *not* have you. I won't give you up. It does not make any difference what I've done. I *didn't*. You belong to me! To *me*, do you hear? She shan't have you! Oh! Oh! Oh!

(sobs)

HUMBOLDT:

"Freedom"! That was your watch-

word. When I mentioned seeing Owen kiss you last night, and many other nights, you said you had a perfect right to kiss whom you chose. You said you would have fifty lovers if you wanted them, and leave me whenever you wished.

(to Jean)

She said we were not to hold each other when love was gone and one of us desired to be free. Each was to come and go as he chose.

(to Sonia)

And you so chose every day during the past eight months.

SONIA:

(half in tears and half in anger)

But I don't choose to go free *now*. I'm satisfied. I won't give you up. You *belong* to *me*.

(growing hysterical)

I'll never give you up! I'll never give

you up! I'll kill you first. Do you hear me?

(to Jean)

I'll kill him! I'll kill you both! I'll throw myself into the river!

(she continues to sob and mumble and groan during the following reply by Humboldt)

HUMBOLDT:

(to Jean)

You see how deep her philosophy of Freedom goes. It applies to her, but not to me or anybody else. I am to be the slave. I have always been the slave. Every night her friends come up here and stay till two, or three and even four o'clock in the morning, drinking and eating, love-making and talking about re-building the world on a nobler, more poetic plan, their plan.

(Jean has seated herself on the edge of a chair)

HUMBOLDT:

We generally rose at about one o'clock in the afternoon, when we were *early*. Sonia's friends dropped in for breakfast before two, and then her crowd of big talkers, talkers, talkers poured in and we would go over the same horrible thing again. I had not a corner in which to work in peace, and I paid the bills.

(bitterly)

That is why you found me sketching night gowns and lingerie to-day.

(Sonia moans loudly)

SONIA:

Send her away, Jimmie. O, I shall *die*! I'm sorry, Jimmie. I'll do better. I don't want anybody but you.

(fiercely, to Jean)

What are you waiting for where you are not wanted? Get out, I tell you. Go!

JEAN :

(opens the door)

Goodbye, Jimmie.

(Humboldt reaches for his hat, intending to accompany her, but Sonia rushes between them: slams the door upon Jean and throws her arms around Humboldt's neck)

SONIA :

You shan't go! I won't give you up! O you dog! You beast! O you sneaking brute. You belong to *me*, I tell you—to *me—me—me!* Do you hear? I'll kill you first! O I want to die!

(Humboldt struggles and releases himself)

HUMBOLDT :

Let go. Let me go. I don't want to hurt you.

SONIA :

I'll kill you! I'll kill you both!

(strikes at him)

(Humboldt coolly walks over and seats himself on the couch)

HUMBOLDT :

What is it you want me to do?

SONIA :

(weeping)

Give her up. You must give her up.
You belong to me. I won't give you up.

(tries to throw herself into his arms)

O Jimmie, love me. Love me a little.
Don't you love me any more?

HUMBOLDT :

(coldly, but furiously)

I do *not*. I love Miss Ward and I intend
to marry her if she will still have me.

SONIA :

(sarcastically)

You never *did* understand the philosophy

of Freedom. It takes intelligence to grasp the idea. Brains!

HUMBOLDT :

I suppose *you* understand it. I've lived in its atmosphere here long enough to know that I don't want any more of it.

SONIA :

Owen always said you were unable to comprehend it in all its beauty, and—

HUMBOLDT :

Go to Owen. Why don't you live with *him*. He wants you. You are perfectly suited to one another. Why have you not left me for Owen? I know. It's because he is too lazy to work, and so are you. You'd both rather endure me and share my earnings than work for yourselves. Freedom! God! I never want to hear the word again.

SONIA :

I knew it! You never understand. You

think a woman should have no friends. You want me to slave and slave and stay locked up alone like an ignorant, conventional husband wants his wife to do.

HUMBOLDT:

I do not. I want you to come and go precisely as you wish—principally to *go*—the farther the better. You shall be free as the air for all I care. Only I want to be free to go myself. It'll be the first *free* moment I've had since I've known you.

SONIA:

(*sarcastically*)

He wants to get *married*! In order to be *free* he wants to be tied to a low-lived street-walker, who visits him in his rooms and throws herself into his arms when his wife is away. The dog!

HUMBOLDT:

Stop that! Miss Ward came here to bring me a commission to paint the illus-

trations for a new book. She's a perfectly respectable girl who works for *her* living.

SONIA :

Respectable? And coming up to make love to another woman's man in his rooms! Ha! Ha! That's a joke.

HUMBOLDT :

(*rising*)

I've had about enough from you, Sonia. I'm going to take a few of my things and get out. We'll never agree.

SONIA :

(*sneering*)

Yes; do go. Get your clothes together and get out, *now, now*; do you hear? I never want to see your sneaking, lying, ignorant, deceitful face again. You have no shame, no honor, no understanding—*nothing*. Go. Get out, and the sooner the better.

HUMBOLDT :

(Humboldt goes to bedroom and reappears with shirts, collars, clothing and suit case)

I *will* go and very thankful to get out of this atmosphere of intrigue and sponging. I hate this whole crowd of high-talking, do-nothing, muddled incompetents. I shall be free to go—

(arranges his clothes in suit case)

—to bed at ten o'clock instead of three. Free to get up in time to see the sun rise, if I want to. Free to spend my own earnings!

(puts shirts into suit case)

Free! Free! Free!

(Sonia lights a cigarette and smokes, sitting on the arm of a rocking chair)

SONIA :

I thought you were weary of “freedom”.

HUMBOLDT:

I have not had any. Where's my other silk shirt?

SONIA:

Owen borrowed it. Too bad; isn't. Such a crime! The gentleman will probably swear out a warrant for his friend because his friend borrowed his little silk shirt.

HUMBOLDT:

(folding underwear)

That makes *sir* he's borrowed, and *kept*. Well, here's one he overlooked. You might tell him to be more careful next time.

SONIA:

You've a pair of sox in the drawer.

(sarcastically)

The gentleman worships private property. He fairly dotes on owning things, and when he dies they will erect a tablet to his memory bearing the inscription:

“He loved his little collars in their box,
box, box,
“And *how* he loved his pretty little sox.
sox. sox!”

HUMBOLDT:

(packing)

He *does*. When he buys clean hose and pays for them out of his hard earned money, he likes to be able to find them when needed. He don't like to steal them from other people—

SONIA:

(mockingly, lighting another cigarette)

“Steal”? Ha! Ha! That's good. Now poor Owen, the notable poet, is a thief. His prospects are ruined. His future is gone. Hope is lost! His reputation is blasted—He stole a pair of sox!

HUMBOLDT:

(folding his ties)

And four good neck-ties, six silk shirts.

most of my underwear, two suits of pajamas and my collars and gold cuff-links, my jade scarf pin—

SONIA:

Your *tooth* brush? For God's sake, see if he left your tooth brush!

(aside to an imaginary servant)

Hutchins, is Mr. Humboldt's tooth brush still reposing safely in the safe? It *is*? Very good. You may go, Hutchins.

HUMBOLDT:

(ignoring her jibes, shuts and fastens suit case)

Sonia, the rent for this apartment is paid up to the first—that's two weeks more. You may keep the furniture, but I'll send for my paints and drawing things. Scott owes me forty dollars. I'll give you half that as soon as I can collect and—

(drawing bills from pocket)

—Here's ten dollars. This will tide you

over till you make some other arrangement.

SONIA :

(springs to her feet and after snatching bill, throws it in his face)

I don't want your dirty money. I want *you*. You shall not go one step. I won't let you go. You belong to me—to me! Do you hear? You beast! You liar! You brute!

(rushes to door and locks it, putting the key into her pocket)

O you brute! You low brute! You think you can throw me over for that vile, ignorant cat; do you? You'll make me the laughingstock of our crowd; will you? I'll show you up with your silly pretensions to understanding Free Philosophy. Wanting to get *married*. Ha! Ha!

HUMBOLDT:

*(sits on chair and puts his bag on the floor.
He speaks very wearily)*

I don't care what you tell anybody. You've probably spoiled things for me with Miss Ward by your vulgar tirade. In Heaven's name, what do you want *now*? Only five minutes ago you told me to get out; said you never wanted to see me again. Now you say you will not let me go. What in hell do you want? I don't want to be brutal, you know.

SONIA:

(sarcastically)

Ha! Ha! Listen to the charming young man. He doesn't want to be *brutal*. That's a joke. He doesn't want to be brutal; he wants to be married. Ha! Ha!

HUMBOLDT:

Yes, I *do* want to be married. I want

to marry Miss Ward if she'll have me. Who's going to stop me? There's tomorrow, you know, and the day after. You can't keep me locked up here forever, you know.

SONIA :

O Ho! How clever you are. Who wants to marry you? Who wants a poor, pitiful, lying, sneaking beast like you when there are *men* in the world! Eugh! But Miss Ward shall not have you. I'll fix that vile cat. Wants to get married; does he?

(her voices rises in fury)

Wants to be *married*? Well, I'll satisfy his craving. He shall have what he wants. I'll just put on my hat and walk straight down to a Justice of the Peace and marry him *myself*! This *moment*. Do you hear? You're going to marry *me*!

HUMBOLDT :

But I don't want to marry you.

SONIA:

(raging)

But *I* want to marry *you*, and that settles it. I'll teach you to go flirting around with other women. I'll *show you!*

(Humboldt sighs; shakes his head and looks around the room for some possible means of escape. Sonia trips into the bedroom where she is heard talking and singing)

SONIA:

(sings two lines to the tune of "Yum, Yum" in the Mikado)

I'm going to be married!

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

SONIA:

(in a sarcastically hysterically voice)

God bless our little home. I'll teach you to meet girls behind my back.

(Humboldt rises and goes very softly to the balcony with his bag. Sonia is heard talking to him from the bedroom)

SONIA:

How surprised Owen will be to hear of the wedding—and Redfield, and Harrington and Virginia. Who ever thought it of us!

(Humboldt pauses and looks around room. His eyes fall on the framed motto which reads,

“PERSONAL LIBERTY

IS

GOD OF THIS SHRINE”

(Humboldt pulls this down and places it in a conspicuous place on the library table)

(Sonia continues to talk to him from the bedroom)

SONIA:

How delighted Miss Ward will be; won't she, dearie? Mrs. James K. Humboldt.

What a charming *name*—and what a damn fool of a husband. Thought you'd fool me; didn't you? Well, I'll teach *you* a lesson.

(Humboldt stealthily goes out on balcony; lifts out bag and drops it into the grass below. He lets himself over the railing and drops below noiselessly)

SONIA:

There shall be no more running around after street women, if I know it.

(she enters room)

All ready, darling!

(she looks about room; rushes into kitchenette and bath room, calling)

Jimmie! Jimmie!

(fiercely)

Jim!

(tries door and finds it still locked. Rushes out onto balcony and sees him departing down the street. Hurries back to living room)

SONIA:

O you brute! You beast! You cowardly sneak! O to think he should treat me in this way! She shall not have him! She shall not have him! I'll kill them both first!

(she sees motto on table and reads aloud:)

“PERSONAL LIBERTY
IS
GOD OF THIS SHRINE”

(throws book at the motto and bursts into tears)

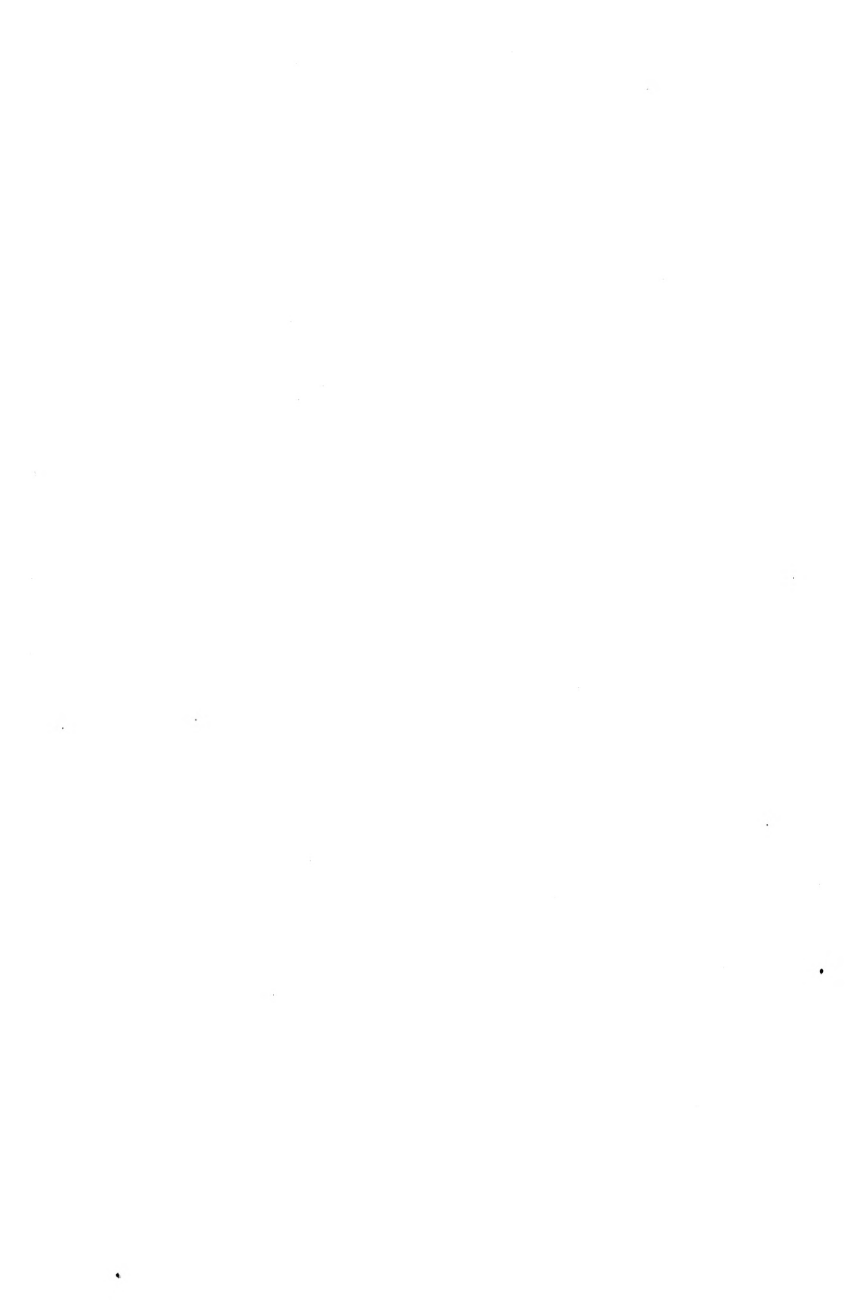
SONIA:

I'll stop him! I'll stop him if it's the last thing I ever do on earth!

(she rushes to door and unlocks it, muttering; goes out into hall leaving door open. As she walks down the hall she can be heard moaning—)

O the brute! The cowardly brute! She shall not have him! She shan't have him! I'll stop him! I'll—

(end)



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